



New Jersey Department of Agriculture
Organic Certification Program

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ORGANIC CERTIFICATION FACT SHEET FOR PRODUCERS

What is Organic Agriculture? Organic agriculture is an agricultural system that uses cultural, biological and mechanical methods to promote soil health, provide fertility, suppress disease, and manage insects and weed pests without relying on routine inputs of synthetic fertilizers and pesticides. An organic farmer uses management techniques such as crop rotation, cover cropping, and promotion of beneficial insects to control pest populations and disease. When needed, organic agriculture utilizes natural materials rather than synthetic materials for fertility and pest control. Farm animals must be fed organic feed, have outdoor access, and be housed in a manner that allows them to engage in their natural behaviors. In addition livestock health care emphasizes prevention of disease and prohibits the use of antibiotics and hormones. Organic products may not be bio-engineered or genetically modified, subjected to irradiation, or produced with sewage sludge (biosolids).

Certified Organic farms are comprised of production areas (i.e. fields) that have had no prohibited substances applied in the 36 months prior to harvest, and which are managed in accordance with *7 CFR Part 205, National Organic Program; Final Rule*, the USDA's national "standards" for organic production and handling.

Process: Farmers document the organic management to be used and the prior three-year histories of production areas on the NJDA Organic Certification application forms (provided in the application package). By completing the application papers, a grower creates the required "organic farm plan". Applications are reviewed by the Supervisor and evaluated for completeness. Complete applications are referred to an independent, trained organic farm inspector who visits the farm to verify the information. The application and inspection report are reviewed for compliance with the rule. All methods and materials used by the operation for production are scrutinized for compliance with the USDA regulations. If an operation is found to be compliant, an organic certification certificate is issued. Operations with multiple minor noncompliance or with a major noncompliance are given time to address the noncompliance and earn certification. The entire process can take between four and six months.

Fees: Certification fees are based on a sliding scale and start at \$285 for first-time applicants and \$235 for renewals. If an additional inspection is required to verify corrective actions, the operation must cover all additional inspection costs.

Certification Regulations: All certified organic operations have to be in compliance with the national rule. A copy of the regulatory text is provided to every applicant. For a preliminary look, you can access the rule on the NOP website at www.ams.usda.gov/nop.

To receive more information: Copies of the regulatory text are available and can be obtained by sending a request to the Supervisor. Application packages are available year round and require a \$25 payment that can be deducted from certification fees.

Call the Organic Program for details, 609-984-2225, or e-mail: erich.bremer@ag.state.nj.us.